

Iowa's Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program

Program Guidance

August 13, 2013

Program Background

Legislative History

The Transportation Alternatives Program was authorized by the most recent Federal transportation funding act, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), which was signed into law on July 6, 2012. The Transportation Alternatives Program redefines the former Transportation Enhancements activities and consolidates these eligibilities with the former Safe Routes to School program. Some projects that were previously funded through the discretionary National Scenic Byways program are now eligible for the Transportation Alternatives Program as are projects eligible under the Recreational Trails Program. The Transportation Enhancements program was originally authorized in the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and continued through two successive laws TEA-21 and SAFETEA-LU.

Iowa Implementation

On January 15, 2013, the Iowa Transportation Commission approved the implementation of MAP-21 as it relates to Transportation Alternatives. After much consideration and through the gathering of stakeholder and general public input, the decision was made to transition to a more locally focused manner of selecting projects for funding. Under SAFETEA-LU, the Iowa DOT retained half of the annual Transportation Enhancements apportionment and selected Statewide Transportation Enhancement projects through a competitive process. The other half of the Transportation Enhancements apportionment was distributed to Iowa's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Affiliations (RPAs) to select projects locally. Under MAP-21 the majority of Transportation Alternatives Program funding will be distributed to the MPOs and RPAs to select projects based on local planning priorities. The Iowa DOT retains final approval authority of award, and will continue to work directly with project sponsors to develop each project. The Iowa DOT will solicit applications for the award of \$1,000,000 through the Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program. This program is intended to provide worthy projects and initiatives that are statewide or multi-regional in nature an opportunity to receive Transportation Alternatives Program funding.

Reimbursable Nature of the Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program is a part of the Federal-aid Highway Program. Although the program is a "grant" program under Federal regulation, it is not an "up-front" grant program and funds are available only on a reimbursement basis. This means project sponsors must incur the cost of the project prior to being repaid. Only after a project has been approved by the Iowa DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) division office, can costs become eligible for reimbursement. Costs must be incurred after FHWA division office project approval or they are not eligible for reimbursement. Requests for reimbursement will be made to the Iowa DOT and must be accompanied by sufficient documentation to show that the project costs have already been paid.

Treatment of Projects Requirement

MAP-21 requires that projects funded by the Transportation Alternatives Program must be carried out under the same rules and procedures as a highway project on a Federal-aid highway. These rules will be

available to successful applicants through the Federal-Aid Project Development Guide as well as through the Iowa DOT Instructional Memorandums. Both of these references can be found on the Iowa DOT website at <http://www.iowadot.gov> .

Iowa's Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program Structure

Eligible Activities

The following categories of activities are eligible for funding under the Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program:

- Transportation Alternatives as defined by 23 U.S.C. 101(a)(29),
- Infrastructure-related or non-infrastructure-related projects formerly eligible through the Safe Routes to School program under Section 1404(f) of the SAFETEA-LU, and
- Projects eligible through the Recreational Trails Program under Section 206 of Title 23.

Transportation Alternatives

Eligible projects must meet one or more of these eligibilities and must relate to surface transportation.

1. Construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other nonmotorized forms of transportation, including sidewalks, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian and bicycle signals, traffic calming techniques, lighting and other safety-related infrastructure, and transportation projects to achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
2. Construction, planning, and design of infrastructure-related projects and systems that will provide safe routes for non-drivers, including children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities to access daily needs.
3. Conversion and use of abandoned railroad corridors for trails for pedestrians, bicyclists, or other nonmotorized transportation users.
4. Construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas.
5. Community improvement activities, which include but are not limited to:
 - a. Inventory, control, or removal of outdoor advertising.
 - b. Historic preservation and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities.
 - c. Vegetation management practices in transportation rights-of-way to improve roadway safety, prevent against invasive species, and provide erosion control.
 - d. Archaeological activities relating to impacts from implementation of a transportation project eligible under this title.
 - e. Streetscaping and corridor landscaping.
6. Any environmental mitigation activity, including pollution prevention and pollution abatement activities and mitigation to:
 - a. Address stormwater management, control, and water pollution prevention or abatement related to highway construction or due to highway runoff, including activities described in sections 133(b)(11), 328(a), and 329; or
 - b. Reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality or to restore and maintain connectivity among terrestrial or aquatic habitats.

Infrastructure-Related Safe Routes to School Projects

The planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school, including:

1. Sidewalk improvements,
2. Traffic calming and speed reduction improvements,
3. Pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements,
4. On-street bicycle facilities,
5. Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities,
6. Secure bicycle parking facilities, and
7. Traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools. (section 1404(f)(1)(a))

Non-Infrastructure Related Safe Routes to School Projects

Activities to encourage walking and bicycling to school, including:

1. Public awareness campaigns and outreach to media and community leaders,
2. Traffic education and enforcement in the vicinity of K-8 schools,
3. Student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and environment, and
4. Funding for training, volunteers, and managers of safe routes to school programs. (section 1404(f)(2)(a))

Recreational Trails Program Projects

Eligible Recreational Trails Program projects include:

1. Maintenance and restoration of existing recreational trails;
2. Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages;
3. Purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment;
4. Construction of new recreational trails (with some restrictions for new trails on Federal lands);
5. Acquisition of easements and fee simple title to property for recreational trails or recreational trail corridors;
6. Assessment of trail conditions for accessibility and maintenance;
7. Development and dissemination of publications and operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection, (as those objectives relate to one or more of the use of recreational trails, supporting non-law enforcement trail safety and trail use monitoring patrol programs, and providing trail-related training), but in an amount not to exceed 5 percent of the apportionment made to the State for the fiscal year; and
8. Payment of costs to the State incurred in administering the program, but in an amount not to exceed 7 percent of the apportionment made to the State for the fiscal year.

Eligible Applicants and Project Sponsors

MAP-21 authorizes the following entities to apply for Transportation Alternatives Program funding:

- Local governments.
- Regional Transportation Authorities.

- Transit Agencies.
- Natural Resource or public lands agencies.
- School Districts, local education agencies or schools.
- Tribal governments.
- Any other local or regional governmental entity with responsibility for oversight of transportation or recreational trails (other than a metropolitan planning organization or a State agency that the State determines to be eligible).
- A non-eligible project sponsor (such as a non-profit) may partner with an eligible co-sponsor in applying for funds.

Eligible Costs

Only certain costs are eligible for reimbursement through the Transportation Alternatives Program. An obligation of funds occurs when a project is approved and a project agreement is executed between the Federal government (FHWA division office) and the Iowa DOT. This is called FHWA Authorization. This does not generally occur until a project has cleared a number of steps in the project development process including the execution of a project agreement between the project sponsor and the Iowa DOT. Although considerable time and money may have already been spent developing a project, the obligation of funds upon FHWA Authorization marks the beginning of project costs which are eligible for reimbursement. Any design and feasibility studies conducted prior to receipt of a Notice to Proceed from the Iowa DOT are not eligible for reimbursement.

After obligation and FHWA Authorization, many project specific costs are eligible. Preliminary and final engineering work including project development, acquisition of right-of-way, environmental work, cost estimates, construction plans, and architectural work are eligible after approval is granted by the Iowa DOT. Utility relocations as permitted under Iowa Code, construction engineering, and construction costs would also be eligible. Any administrative, maintenance, or general planning studies would not be eligible. Upon award, each project will be assigned a dedicated contact person within the Iowa DOT who will work with the project sponsor through each step of the project development process.

Local Match

Transportation Alternatives Program funds may pay for up to 80 percent of eligible project costs or up to the approved grant maximum, whichever is less. A local match is required to pay for 20 percent or more of the remaining project costs. This match requirement also applies to traditional Safe Routes to School projects. Federal funds cannot be used as matching funds, unless expressly permitted by law. State funds are eligible for use as match. In-kind services or donated services, materials, or real property donated by a third party may also be counted as match under certain circumstances and with Iowa DOT approval.

Application Process

Deadline

Application submittals for each October 1 funding round must be postmarked by **October 1**, and include an original and four (4) hardcopies of the completed application and all attachments. Email submissions of the completed application by the stated deadline are allowed, but the original and four (4) hardcopies of the completed application must follow by mail.

Required Submittal

A complete application will consist of the following:

1. A completed application form.
2. A narrative assessing existing conditions, outlining the concept of the proposed project, and providing adequate project justification as described in the application form.
3. A detailed map identifying the location of the project.
4. If applicable, a sketch-plan of the project, including cross-section for bicycle or pedestrian facilities.
5. An itemized breakdown of the total project costs.
6. A time schedule for the total project development.
7. An official endorsement of the project from the authority to be responsible for its maintenance and operation according to the requirements included in the application form.
8. If applicable, a letter of support for the project from the scenic or historic byway board.
9. A narrative discussing the public input process that was followed, the extent to which adjacent property owners and others have been informed of the proposed project, and an assessment of their acceptance.

Project Selection

In addition to meeting Transportation Alternatives Program eligibility requirements, projects funded under the Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program are intended to have a statewide or multi-regional significance. As such, applications for projects such as trails that could be considered primarily local impact projects will not be scored favorably.

An assessment of the relative statewide significance of a project may be made by considering the following:

1. Statewide or multi-regional impact of the project,
2. Degree of enhancement of the quality or utility of the state's overall surface transportation system,
3. State or multi-regional tourism benefits, and
4. Degree of statewide or multi-regional planning implemented

Applications will be reviewed by the Iowa DOT who will consider the above criteria. Projects recommended for funding will be presented to the Iowa Transportation Commission for approval.

Following Commission action, project sponsors will be notified of their award, and details concerning initiating project development will be given. Final funding approval will come from the FHWA after National Environmental Policy Act approval has been received. The Iowa DOT reserves the right to reduce or adjust grant requests.

Funds Awarded

Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program funds may be awarded for up to 80 percent of the estimated eligible total project costs. If a project is located along a National Scenic Byway or State Historic or Scenic Byway, has the endorsement of the appropriate byway organization, is a project of statewide or multi-regional significance, and has received Transportation Alternatives funding up to 50 percent of estimated eligible total project costs through the local Metropolitan Planning Organization or Regional Planning Affiliation; the project may be eligible to receive an additional award of up to 30 percent of estimated eligible total project costs of Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program funding. Actual federal funds applied to a project will not exceed 80 percent of total project costs, or the maximum award amount, whichever is less.

Contacts

Interested applicants should contact the Iowa DOT for additional information:

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Federal Requirements, Standards, or Guidelines

Since the Statewide Transportation Alternatives Program is a part of the Federal-aid highway program, awarded projects are subject to certain Federal laws and regulations including:

1. Involvement of the public, including the adjacent property owners, in the development of the project.
2. Compliance with the Uniform Relocation Property Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (the Uniform Act) for the acquisition of easements or the purchase of land in fee simple. This includes fair treatment practices and may include the completion of an appraisal on parcels to be acquired. This requirement applies whether or not federal funds will be used for the acquisition costs.
3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This requires verification the project is not harmful to the environment in the following areas:
 - Noise - impacts of noise during and after construction.
 - Air Quality - compliance with Iowa's state implementation plan for maintaining its attainment status relative to the national ambient air quality standards. Conformity with the requirements of the Clean Air Act must be verified.
 - Cultural Resources - disturbances to areas of archaeological or historical significance. Properties proposed for rehabilitation or preservation must be eligible for or on the list of the National Register of Historic Places. (Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act)
 - Water Quality - impacts to water quality.
 - Wetlands - impacts to wetlands.
 - Floodplains - impacts to regulatory floodways or to a 110-year floodplain.
 - Farmland Protection - impacts to surrounding farmland.
 - Hazardous Waste Sites - location of and impacts to hazardous waste sites.
4. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Projects must conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act, which allows for reasonable access to the project for persons with disabilities.
5. Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) and Minority Business Enterprises (MBE). Verification must be received that efforts have been made to solicit bids from disadvantaged and minority business enterprises.
6. Davis-Bacon Wage Requirements. Projects will be required to comply with Davis-Bacon wage requirements, which state that contractors will conform to federal minimum wage requirements.
7. Competitive bidding requirements. Construction projects are required to be let through the Iowa DOT or according to procedures for a public letting as per Sections 26.3 through 26.13 of the Code of Iowa.
8. Permits or Other Approvals. It is the project owner/sponsor's responsibility to obtain all permits or other approvals that may be required as a result of the activities proposed as part of the project.

